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ABSTRACT

Described are six elementary schools in Virginia that were judged as meeting nine criteria for programs facilitating participatory decision-making by teachers. The term "participatory decision-making" refers to the sharing of decisions on school policies and practices between teachers and school administrators. Information on the schools' programs was obtained through a survey and a telephone interview. While the focus of the descriptions was teacher involvement, at least one of the projects described the extension of participatory decision-making to student and parent groups. The six program profiles are organized around six topics: (1) program development and goals; (2) organizational structure; (3) required resources; (4) assessment; (5) future of the program; and (6) advice to others. Related demographic information is provided in each profile. Concluding discussion: (1) reports accomplishments of the projects in the areas of communications, school climate, and other accomplishments; (2) offers suggestions for assessing similar projects; and (3) describes obstacles to success. Nearly 60 references are cited in a bibliography on participatory decision-making. The survey instrument and related materials are appended. (RH)

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VEA-VAESP-AEL

Participatory Decision-making: Working Models in Virginia Elementary Schools

A Joint Study by

- **The Virginia Education Association,**
- **The Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, and**
- **Appalachia Educational Laboratory**

February 1988

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Funded by Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U. S. Department of Education

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) is located in Charleston, West Virginia. Its mission is to work with the Region's educators in an ongoing R & D-based effort to improve education and educational opportunity. To accomplish this mission AEL works toward:

- the improvement of professional quality,
- the improvement of curriculum and instruction,
- the improvement of community support, and
- the improvement of opportunity for access to quality education by all children.

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Participatory Decisionmaking: Working Models in Virginia Elementary Schools

Introduction

AEL seeks to provide professional development opportunities to educators by working with and through their associations. Since 1985, one way that the Classroom Instruction (CI) and School Governance and Administration (SGA) programs have assisted associations is through the creation of study groups. AEL's purpose for a study group is to assist educators in conducting and using research.

A study group is composed of educators who are organized to conduct a study on an educational issue and who produce a product that is useful to their colleagues. Associations and AEL jointly select topics for study groups, although the selection of members is handled by the association. AEL staff participate in meetings as members of the study group and usually take a facilitative role. AEL provides a small grant to the association to assist with the study group, but the association or individual members often make in-kind contributions that far exceed AEL's grant. AEL provides additional services, such as editing, layout, and typesetting of the group's final product. The responsibility for dissemination lies with both AEL and the association. Usually, AEL provides dissemination to the other three states in its Region while the association covers dissemination of the study group product in its own state.

Planning the Study

During March 1987, meetings and conference calls between Helen Rolfe, Virginia Education Association Instruction and Professional Development Director, Bob Richards, Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, and Jane Hange and Sandra Orletsky, directors of the Classroom Instruction and School Governance and Administration programs respectively, resulted in the formation of the VEA-VAESP-AEL study group. Both association leaders nominated members for study group participation. The group was comprised of five teachers, five elementary school principals, and staff members from VEA, VAESP, and AEL. The group's task was to examine the concept of participatory decisionmaking in Virginia's elementary schools. In its initial meeting, the study group decided that a product relating to this theme that could be of significant assistance to educators would be a directory of participatory decisionmaking projects currently in operation in Virginia's elementary schools.

Conducting the Study

Members developed a written survey (see Appendix A) to enable the principal and a lead teacher or teacher significantly involved in the project to describe the project's development, goals, organization, participant training, costs, accomplishments, obstacles, and future plans. Copies of the survey were sent to the superintendent of each Virginia division with a cover letter inviting him/her to nominate one elementary school in the division where participatory decisionmaking was employed. A letter of invitation to school personnel and copies of the survey were enclosed for the superintendent's distribution to the nominated school.

Fifteen schools throughout Virginia were nominated and returned completed forms. Following the study group's review of selections from the developing literature on participatory decisionmaking, members met to analyze the submissions against a list of characteristics they deemed important to such projects. Six elementary schools were chosen for further study and possible inclusion in the final product.

A telephone survey designed to elicit further information based upon results of the written survey was developed by AEL. VEA and VAESP staff representatives on the study group then conducted audiotaped telephone interviews with the principal and a key teacher from each of the six selected schools. The telephone survey is included as Appendix B.

The taped interviews were a focal point of the next study group meeting, at which members developed an outline for directory sections and for the composition of each case study. Members then formed principal-teacher writing teams and selected one of the six schools' projects for development of their case study. AEL agreed to develop the sixth case study. Working together or as peer editors, the teams completed case studies while AEL staff drafted the introduction, definition, accomplishments, obstacles, bibliography, and product evaluation form sections.

Completed sections were submitted to AEL, where staff edited and typeset copy and produced a draft directory for study group and association review. Revisions based upon reviewers' suggestions were completed by AEL staff. AEL provided camera-ready copies to each association and met with leaders and staff to discuss dissemination of the product in Virginia. AEL publicizes the directory in its Region and provides copies at cost through its Resource Center.

Study Results

The study group deemed the following nine characteristics as important to participatory decisionmaking projects:

1. commitment to the project from division and school administration,
2. recognition of the importance of the goals of the group or project—"We see where we can really make a difference,"
3. recognition of the importance of increased productivity and faculty/administrator satisfaction through shared decisionmaking,
4. financial support of staff training and for substitute teachers to permit release time for teachers,
5. financial support for faculty participation in summer training when necessary,
6. involvement of strong and committed leadership among teacher and administrator participants,
7. recognition of the importance of keeping interest alive among faculty members and administrators,
8. communications training for faculty and administrators involved in the project, and
9. provision through release time or other means of "think time" for participants.

Projects in the following schools among those

nominated were found to include these nine characteristics:

1. Beaverdam Elementary School
   Hanover County Schools
2. Churchill Road Elementary School
   Fairfax County Schools
3. Douglass Park Elementary School
   Portsmouth Public Schools
4. Fallon Park Elementary School
   Roanoke City Schools
5. Ingleside Elementary School
   Norfolk City Schools
6. Penn Forest Elementary School
   Roanoke County Schools

More information about their participatory decisionmaking projects can be found in the case studies that follow.

Help Us Make This Directory Better

Readers are requested to complete the product evaluation form included with the directory and to fold, staple, and return it to AEL. Suggestions for revisions to the document and/or similar publications are welcome.

Participatory Decisionmaking: An Operational Definition

PARTICIPATORY decisionmaking, collegial management, organizational development, the team approach to school management, and other descriptors have been applied to the concept of increased involvement of teachers and school-based administrators in school and district decisionmaking. A review of the emerging literature in this area yields no common definition. But what do we mean by participatory decisionmaking?

Participatory decisionmaking involves reorganizing the school's decisionmaking structure to allow input from all affected constituencies (Marburger, 1985). The projects described in this publication have at least one common concept—an increase in teacher involvement in school-based decisionmaking. Respondents described different types of shared decisionmaking ranging from teacher dress code on inservice or "work" days to "just about everything," including staff development topic selection and scheduling, student placement, course scheduling, utilization of instructional aides, purchasing, and teaching assignments.

Recent calls for the reform and restructuring of education have frequently cited the increased involvement of teachers in school decisionmaking as important to the success of most school improvement (Carnegie Task Force, 1986; Sizer, 1984; NEA, 1984). The Metropolitan Life Survey of The American Teacher 1986 (Harris et al., 1986) analyzed the views of 1,602 teachers and 702 educational leaders about the restructuring of the teaching profession. Ninety-seven percent of teachers believed that teachers should be involved in a team approach to school management, but only 50 percent believed teachers actually do share in the management of schools. The potential value of teacher participation in work-related policy decisions is too often ignored.

Reformers and practitioners recognize the necessity of ownership of change efforts by those involved (Schlechty, 1985; Bacharach and Conley, 1986). Such ownership shouldn't begin with implementation of an intervention such as curriculum adoption or inservice on a new textbook series. Practitioners at the level nearest the decision's impact should be involved in deciding. Schools might learn from effectively managed organizations in the private sector that give employees a say in decisions that directly affect their work (Herrick, 1985; Bacharach and Conley, 1986).

In this publication, participatory decisionmaking refers to the sharing of decisions on school policies and practices between teachers and school administrators. The focus of the publication is teacher involvement in school-based decisionmaking, but at least one of the projects described extending participatory decisionmaking to student and parent groups.

Study group members, AEL, VAESP, and VEA staff invite you to expand your knowledge about participatory decisionmaking by reading about these programs in Virginia elementary schools and then obtaining additional information from the principals and teachers cited.

Beaverdam Elementary School

Participatory Decisionmaking

Program Development and Goals

Ten years ago, Beaverdam established an organizational chart with teacher coordinators for grade levels and teacher representatives for science, math, and other subjects. The purpose was to foster interdependence and improved communication. The participatory decisionmaking program has three goals:

1. to develop a complete cycle of events to make and implement rational decisions;
2. to increase teacher satisfaction with the profession of teaching, to increase school morale, and to increase student and community involvement with the school; and
3. to increase to the highest degree the positive contributions of participatory decisionmaking.

Demographics

Address: Rt. 1, Box 190, Beaverdam, VA 23015

Phone: 804/798-5929

Division: Hanover County Schools

Principal: Bradford Lee Ashley

Teacher: Patricia Smagala

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-Grade 6

School Size: 350 students, 26 teachers

Organizational Structure

The three coordinators (K-3, 4-6, and special services) are nominated on an annual basis. They serve as a direct link between the faculty and the school administrator. Coordinators facilitate the flow of communication by meeting with their respective subgroups and with the principal.

Subgroups are made up of teachers of a grade level or a specific category in special services. They meet a minimum of twice per month with their coordinator and once per month with the entire faculty.

Ad hoc groups, such as the instructional purchasing committee, consist of 8-10 teachers. These groups bring information before the faculty for a vote.

The extent of teachers' influence on a decision depends on the type of decision and teachers' involvement and expertise. Decisions fall into three areas or phases:

1. *Area of compliance (Phase I)*—Administrative decisionmaking is appropriate. Some examples of decisions made by the principal are assignments for bus and cafeteria duty, vehicular traffic flow, scheduling of buses for field trips, lunch schedules, and deadline dates for reports.

2. *Area of marginal participatory decisionmaking (Phase II)*—In decisions reflecting low teacher involvement or low teacher expertise, the administrator makes decisions after receiving input from faculty members. Coordinators discuss these decisions with the administrator after talking with the teachers they represent. Setting teacher schedules, allocating instructional time, designating student teaching days, and developing a staff handbook are examples of decisions in this area.

3. *Area of participatory decisionmaking (Phase III)*—Decisions in this area reflect high teacher involvement and expertise. The administrator introduces facts and helps facilitate discussion. All group members have an equal vote, and the majority rules. The administration remains neutral. Some examples of decisions made through participatory decisionmaking are staff development topics, staff dress code on work days, scheduling of course content, instructional

purchases, selection of teacher of the year, and development of the assertive discipline plan.

Participatory decisionmaking has also been used with support staff to set bus safety priorities and emergency calling procedures, and with the PTA regarding expenditure of PTA funds, election of officers, and school evaluation.

Required Resources

Staff development is provided for all faculty members at the beginning of the school year. This includes the participatory decisionmaking organization, a review of group and individual responsibilities, and the decisionmaking process. Staff training is reinforced by the coordinators during the school year.

The cost of the participatory decisionmaking project is minimal. Staff development is conducted during school hours. Training is done by the school administrator, with the cost of supplies coming from the instructional allocation.

Assessment

The program is assessed through the development of the biennial school plan.

Future of the Program

The participatory decisionmaking project will continue during the 1987-88 school year. Staff will continue to improve present structure and meeting schedules and will increase participatory decisionmaking by staff, particularly support personnel.

Advice to Others

Suggestions for implementing a participatory decisionmaking model include the following:

- Involve the faculty from the beginning.
- Determine how the group is to arrive at a decision.
- Provide staff development to ensure success.
- Evaluate the program on an annual basis.
- Avoid participatory decisionmaking when it is not needed. Participation when it is not necessary will produce negative results.

Churchill Road Elementary School

Participatory Decisionmaking Project

Program Development and Goals

Churchill Road Elementary's participatory decisionmaking project was initiated by the principal. With the assistance of the volunteer Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC), she sponsored three days of open forum Principal's Lunches, during which faculty were urged to express concerns about the school's functioning. The second step was a half-day retreat away from the school, where the principal and the FAC dealt with faculty concerns or delegated them to other committees already in place. The third step was to clarify the purposes and function of each committee and to appoint other committees and ad hoc task forces where needed.

The expected outcome of this endeavor is open door management and an organizational plan that involves the entire faculty in shared decisionmaking.

Demographics

Address: 7100 Churchill Road
McLean, VA 22101

Phone: 703/356-5112

Division: Fairfax County Schools

Principal: Susan Warner

Teacher: Carolyn Sherman

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-Grade 6

School Size: 491 students, 26 teachers

Organizational Structure

A. Structures. Churchill Road's participatory decisionmaking project consists primarily of a structure of committees and teams involving the faculty in making policy decisions about various areas of school life. A combination of appointment, volunteerism, and selection has been used to determine participation in the various groups. Frequent full faculty meetings devoted to setting school policies and building consensus are also an important component of shared decisionmaking.

Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC). The role of the FAC is not to make specific decisions but rather to guide decisions affecting the total staff, to solve problems, and to assist the principal in developing strategies to deal with whatever concerns arise. Each FAC member represents several grade levels: K-2, 3-4, 5-6, and all the itinerant teachers (art, physical education, etc.). Either through regularly scheduled grade level meetings or specially called meetings, each FAC member elicits the input of teachers she or he represents. Some of the areas in which the FAC has taken leadership are student discipline, scheduling, defining the roles of the secretaries, and student placement.

Grade Level Teams. Teams for each grade level are responsible for developing annual operating plans to meet schoolwide objectives. They discuss curriculum pacing and share materials, good ideas, and other information. In split-grade classrooms, the teacher attends both Grade Level Team meetings.

Writing and Science Teams. There are writing teams mandated by the county and a science team created as a result of faculty and community recognition that the school needed to strengthen its science program. The school designates one teacher for each two grade levels (1-2, 3-4, and 5-6) to receive training in the Elementary Science Study curriculum. That teacher is responsible for training and providing ongoing assistance to all the other teachers in the two grade levels.

Staff Development Committee . A newly created Staff Development Committee is charged with setting priorities, planning, and coordinating the school's staff development program for the year. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provides a staff development fund, to which teachers may apply for release time to attend conferences or engage in other staff development activities. The Staff Development Committee, which includes a PTA board member as well as faculty members, selects the grant recipients.

Ad Hoc Task Forces. So far there has been one time-limited ad hoc task force, created to deal with a longstanding problem: inequitable distribution of instructional aides. Their recommendation was implemented, and the task force disbanded.

B. Examples of Decisions. A recent example of decisionmaking that involves the entire faculty was the development of a school mission statement. The faculty brainstormed verbs and nouns they thought described the school, then linked the two together in key phrases. The principal developed the mission statement on the basis of this input and received feedback before finalizing the statement.

The principal also recommended one of the teachers as a consulting teacher in the performance evaluation plan, which the school will conduct with its own resources instead of obtaining assistance from central administration. The teacher and principal will co-teach a course titled "The Skillful Teacher." The teacher has taken a training program to prepare her for this responsibility.

Required Resources

The FAC retreat requires half a day of release time for the teachers involved. Considerable training has been provided by the principal and division level curriculum staff in such areas as the Parnes/Osborne/Treffinger Creative Problem Solving Model, adult learning, and content delivery.

Assessment

There has been no formal evaluation to date. Informal reactions from FAC members and other faculty can be summarized as, "Stimulating," "I've come alive," "I can't wait for next year," "My professionalism has been awakened." One faculty member commented that the faculty would certainly vote for this decisionmaking system over anything they have done in the past.

Future of the Program

Churchill Road Elementary plans to continue the participatory decisionmaking project. The principal will train teachers on the FAC in the Creative Problem Solving Model, thus increasing the effects of the model on the entire staff. Ad hoc task forces will be created in the future as particular needs arise, and the existing committees will be strengthened with additional training as opportunities arise. In the future, the faculty hopes to organize each year's committees and task forces during the spring of the preceding year.

Advice to Others

Staff offered the following advice to future implementers of participatory decisionmaking models. Time must be spent in building trust. Discussion must be truly open, with dissent encouraged and valued. Open consensus-building must occur to allow "power groups" within the faculty to see that they are outvoted. Compromise must involve concession on all sides to avoid backlash. The recognition that change takes place in many mini-steps must occur. Be ready to celebrate little bits of progress. Above all, listen and communicate.

Douglass Park Elementary School

School Improvement Model

Program Development and Goals

The School Improvement Model was adopted to ensure that there is an effective instructional program in the school and to establish cooperative working relationships between the administration and the teachers. The purpose of this program is to establish a system in which school administrators and teachers can work cooperatively in providing leadership and direction in achieving the mission of the school division. The mission established by the school board is to ensure that all students learn.

Demographics

Address: Grand and Shelby Streets, Portsmouth, VA 23701

Phone: 804/393-8646

Division: Portsmouth Public Schools

Principal: Viola Morgan

Teacher: Marilin Kirkby

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-Grade 4

School Size: 950 students, 46 teachers

Organizational Structure

The Douglass Park Elementary School model was developed in conjunction with the decisionmaking model established for Portsmouth Public Schools. In this model, teachers are encouraged and expected to assume a major role in decisionmaking procedures related to developing curriculum, delivering instruction, and designing school programs. To facilitate this participation, the Portsmouth Public Schools implemented the following major concepts:

Teaching Teams. A teaching team is comprised of three or four teachers working with approximately 90-110 students in one grade level. Each team meets regularly to review student progress and to change placement for instruction if needed.

Learning Support Teams. All instructional support programs (e.g., Chapter I, special education, etc.) are organized around the classroom teachers' program. Chapter I personnel provide in-class support, rather than a special pull-out program. Special education teachers provide as much in-classroom support as possible and serve in consultant roles with classroom teachers. Learning Support Team leaders monitor progress of every child assigned to that school and coordinate extra assistance whenever a student's performance indicates a need.

Core Teams. The Core Team consists of the principal, assistant principal, one member from each Teaching Team, and the Learning Support Team leaders. Members are administratively assigned for a period of one year. The major task of the Core Team is to monitor the progress of school programs. Core Team responsibilities include implementing a problem-solving and decisionmaking model, monitoring the instructional program, facilitating communication, and engaging staff in activities to assist in creating a positive school climate. The Core Team meets monthly or as needed. Meetings allow for interaction between all of the teams and with the school administrators.

Some examples of decisions made through this decisionmaking process include: times and agenda items for faculty meetings, scheduling of classes, student discipline, and student placement.

Required Resources

Six days of staff development for each teacher are necessary. Staff must be available to provide training.

Core Team training involves one week of training before school begins for each Core Team member.

Assessment

The program will be evaluated and revised as needed to improve the model. An oral survey, conducted in 1986-87, found that teachers strongly approved of the program.

Future of the Program

The program will be continued with some adjustments for the 1987-1988 school year. Some new concepts and ideas will be implemented. For example, the name "Core Team" will be changed to "TAC (Teacher Advisory Council)."

Advice to Others

Staff suggested the following guidelines for those who might implement a similar program:

- Have an open mind.
- Have a communication system already in place.
- Work together, and consider that everyone's opinion counts.
- Implement new projects on a trial basis.
- Provide training for all persons involved in the program.

Fallon Park Elementary School

Program Improvement Council (PIC)

Program Development and Goals

The Fallon Park Elementary Program Improvement Council (PIC) was initiated by the principal and the assistant principal during the 1982-83 school year. The PIC fulfills a Roanoke City School Board goal that all schools develop a school-based communication plan that encourages all staff members to be part of the problem-solving process. Expected outcomes include improvement of communication between the teachers and administration and among teachers. Enhancement of teacher effectiveness and the development of an instructionally effective school are additional goals. Team-building is to be fostered, and all staff members are encouraged to be a part of the problem-solving process by sharing information and making decisions affecting the total school community. Through the PIC, a means is provided by which the staff can voice concerns, suggestions, and instructional strategies.

Demographics

Address: 502 19th Street, SE
Roanoke, VA 24013

Phone: 703/981-2535

Division: Roanoke City Schools

Principal: Lois Atkins

Teacher: Dave Hurley

Grade Levels: Preschool-Grade 6

School Size: 850 students, 45 teachers

Organizational Structure

The major committee is the Program Improvement Council, which is composed of the principal, assistant principal, and level coordinators. The level coordinators are teacher representatives from each grade level or department (K-6, Chapter I, special education, and other specialists) appointed by the principal. Each teacher has an opportunity to become a coordinator.

Level coordinators serve a two-year term. Each represents three to six staff persons. The level teams of teachers are the subgroups of the program organized by grade.

PIC meetings are held weekly for 45 minutes to an hour. Level coordinators set the meeting date and time. The principal sets the agenda and conducts the meeting. The assistant principal records the minutes and copies and distributes them to each teacher immediately following the meeting. Teachers may address the group by contacting the principal to be placed on the agenda of a PIC meeting. Schoolwide committees at times address PIC meetings and gather information from PIC members.

Each coordinator plans an agenda and conducts his or her level meeting at the end of the PIC meeting day or the morning of the next day. The purpose of level meetings is to discuss instruction, students, and level business in addition to topics from the PIC meeting that require discussion in order to make final decisions.

The PIC members are responsible for attending PIC meetings, conducting level meetings, and bringing, receiving, and disseminating information. As a council, their responsibility is to problem-solve and to keep the channels of communication open among their team members and the principal. The principal retains the final decisionmaking responsibility.

Problems resolved through participatory decisionmaking include the organization of detention hall and the provision of planning time for kindergarten teachers. Instructional sched-

uling and bus duty have been discussed through level meetings followed by PIC sessions.

Coordinators and their teacher teams have met with the principal during the summer to arrange teaching schedules.

Required Resources

The resources required to implement the PIC program are moderate. A resource person must be available to conduct a three-hour training session in role clarification, leadership style, group process, conflict management, and communication skills. Release time must be provided to compensate coordinators for noncontractual time. Personnel are needed to cover classes the last 30 minutes of PIC meetings on a weekly basis. Funding for annual breakfast and luncheon meetings is necessary.

Assessment

A formal planning survey was completed in May 1987. Recommendations for improving the Program Improvement Council were sought. The survey found that the PIC resulted in increased motivation and responsibility among staff members.

Future of the Program

The Program Improvement Council (PIC) will continue to be used at Fallon Park Elementary. Ongoing training in team leadership for level coordinators will be provided.

This program works well in a large school by increasing the involvement of each teacher in various decisions outside the classroom. Teachers are informed of all decisions, have input into decisions, and have the opportunity to participate as a coordinator.

Advice to Others

Staff offered the following suggestions for implementing participatory decisionmaking programs. The administrator must constantly clarify which ideas the group will decide and which issues he or she will decide, after gathering input from the faculty. It is important that the administrator remain open to any and all suggestions without making judgements. It is critical that the administrator have an agenda for meetings. All persons involved must be informed about the goals, procedures, and strengths of such a program. The advice from Fallon Park Elementary School is "sell the staff on the idea before trying to implement it."

Ingleside Elementary School

Believe-Achieve-Succeed

Demographics

Address: 976 Ingleside Road
Norfolk, VA 23502

Phone: 804/466-8228

Division: Norfolk City Schools

Principal: Bonita Clare Bill

Teacher: Naomi Bethea

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-Grade 6

School Size: 720 students, 31 teachers

Program Development and Goals

The Believe-Achieve-Succeed participatory decisionmaking program began with a set of program goals adopted from research about effective schools and from the Madeline Hunter model for mastery teaching. To achieve these goals, the program adapted a model called Individually Guided Education (IGE) developed at the University of Wisconsin. Five or six schools originally participated in the school district's IGE program. Ingleside Elementary is one of two or three schools still functioning as IGE schools.

Participatory decisionmaking is an important part of the IGE model. The broad goal of the Ingleside structure is to allow staff to make decisions about procedures, events, and the spending of funds that will affect them. One area of decisionmaking that has motivated staff is parallel scheduling—cooperation among teachers to allow many different things to go on at the same time to meet student needs.

Organizational Structure

A. Program Improvement Council (PIC). Administrators appoint teachers to teams of three or four teachers. Team leaders are selected annually to represent the teams on the Program Improvement Council (PIC).

The PIC is the core decisionmaking group for the school. PIC makes decisions about discipline procedures, special programs, and materials and supplies, to name a few examples.

PIC members are responsible for attending PIC meetings, bringing information to their teams for a decision, and then sharing team recommendations with the PIC. All major program and financial decisions are reached by consensus among PIC members. Any PIC member can reject an item and thus create a situation where compromise *must* occur before the decision is made. Often issues have to be taken back to the teams before decisions are made. The PIC meets at least once a month, and agendas are determined by written items submitted to the administration prior to the meeting. A PIC meeting can be called by request of any member of the faculty.

B. Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). Another important teacher decisionmaking group is the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT), which handles faculty referrals of students having learning or behavior problems. The Teacher Assistance Team is composed of three teacher members elected annually by the entire faculty. The TAT is responsible for meeting with teachers who refer students, observing the students in class if necessary, helping to generate solutions, and occasionally referring students to outside agencies.

Other Groups. A number of other formal groups contribute to school decisionmaking.

- Support staff, including building custodians, are invited to PIC meetings; they also meet monthly with the administrators.

- The Parent Advisory Council and PTA meet regularly to give input to school decisions.
- One of the student groups is the unique student patrol system. Each class elects one patrol member; teachers select additional patrols as needed. Patrols meet monthly with the administrators and assist daily in resolving concerns and conflicts raised by students.
- Another student group is the student government, elected by the student body. Faculty and student government representatives mutually decide on ideas and activities to better the school program.

Required Resources

The program requires no monetary expenses. Considerable human energy is required: willingness to help, a philosophy that all persons have worth and dignity, and commitment to making time in busy schedules to meet and solve problems. Training relating to the IGE model is required for all teachers and administrators. A two-week summer workshop is offered at the district level, or new teachers can be trained at the building level by the principal and school faculty.

Assessment

Evaluation is ongoing; staff make changes as needed and create new programs and procedures. Formal evaluation occurs through the systemwide school improvement questionnaire, which generates data concerning most aspects of the school from staff, parents, administrators, and students.

Future of the Program

The program will continue during 1987-88. The administrators would like to expand the program to the point where teachers are totally self-governing, using administrators as the staff deems necessary and productive. Plans for the future are to continue to increase the decisionmaking of staff in even more productive and creative ways.

Advice to Others

Staff offered the following guidelines for schools implementing participatory decisionmaking projects:

- Send representatives to view existing models to help internalize the procedures for achieving objectives.
- Begin slowly and methodically; take one step at a time.
- Observe successful programs, read widely, and implement only those elements that appear to be likely to work for the individuals in a particular school.
- Be willing to relinquish power with no reservations, as staff will feel discouraged if the structure for participatory decisionmaking is in place but not truly implemented.
- Put the emphasis on positive human relations, stressing fairness and true caring for each individual.

Penn Forest Elementary School

Policy Making Through a Participatory Process

Program Development and Goals

The Policy Making Through a Participatory Process program was developed at the district level and has been the model used since Penn Forest Elementary opened in 1972. The principal introduced participatory decisionmaking to the school as an outgrowth of study at the University of Virginia. Since that time, the decisionmaking goals and practices have been refined through the process of setting mutual goals, defining priorities, making concrete plans, evaluating, and educating through inservices.

The overall goal is to maintain a decisionmaking process that invites participation by all staff members. Collaboration of faculty, staff, and administration occurs regarding policy and procedures, academic programs, and school activities.

Demographics

Address: 6328 Merriman Road
Roanoke, VA 24018

Phone: 703/989-0806

Division: Roanoke County

Principal: Patricia Sales

Teacher: Nancy Carson

Grade Levels: Kindergarten-Grade 5

School Size: 543 students, 35 teachers

Organizational Structure

A. Structures. The school's organizational structure includes grade level teams and a special education team with four or five teachers per team. One teacher in each team serves as coordinator or liaison to other teachers. Each incumbent coordinator and new applicants for this position are interviewed annually by the school administration; the results of this interview, along with successful performance, determine appointment. The coordinators and the administrators serve as the Planning Council for the school and meet monthly throughout the year to discuss results of grade level meetings.

Individual grade level and general staff meetings are held weekly during the school year. The following are examples of concerns discussed at a first grade planning meeting: classroom duties, annual plans, grouping of children for reading and math, fall field trip, and implementation of a drug awareness program. Agendas are printed and distributed for general staff meetings, and time is allotted for questions and concerns. Following general staff meetings, the "Pony Express," which recaps items covered and decisions made at the meeting, is distributed. Additionally, subject area articulation meetings are held between grade levels as the need arises. Each teacher may have input into the agendas of any of these meetings. Teacher representatives are also part of similar participatory decisionmaking at PTA meetings.

Support staffs (paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and the janitorial staff) meet as groups on a monthly basis or as needed. An administrator is usually available to meet with the support staff. One outcome of a recent janitor meeting was the development of a schedule to be implemented if a janitor was absent and a substitute could not be found.

The responsibility of the above groups is to provide short- and long-term planning, to give information, and to exchange ideas. Communication is enhanced through written information such as agendas and minutes of faculty meetings, a school information sheet, and the school newsletter, the "Penn and Ink."

B. Examples of Decisions. Improvement of the school's textbook rental program is an

example of how these groups work together to make policy decisions. The community requested a change in the textbook rental system, which required separate checks for each child's textbook fees at the school. Those parents who had two or three children at Penn Forest wanted to be able to write one check for their children's fees.

During their meeting, paraprofessionals discussed the pros and cons of the present system as compared to a one-check-per-family system. Then the teachers considered the problem and the alternatives suggested by the paraprofessionals. A plan was implemented allowing parents to pay textbook fees for all their children with one check. A new form was designed to accommodate the change.

Other examples of decisions undertaken include:

- implementation and evaluation of the Pizza Hut Reading Incentive Program;
- solution of consequences generated by an emergency situation (no water in the building one morning);
- creation of a discipline policy and assurance of consistency among teachers;
- improved utilization of school space; and
- organization of the team teaching model.

Required Resources

A. Release Time for Teachers. Teachers who receive training beyond the building level are given release time from their classes, and substitutes are provided by the county for a total of three full days per participant. At the building level, teachers cover for each other, or paraprofessionals are used to cover classes. The principal and assistant principal also cover classes in order to release teachers.

B. Coordinator Remuneration. A small stipend (approximately 2% of annual salary) is paid semiannually to coordinating teachers.

C. Planning Time. The Planning Council meets every Thursday for an hour. Grade level and general staff meetings are conducted weekly during school time with arrangements made for covering classes. Additional articulation meetings are held between grade levels as the need arises. Support staff (paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and the janitorial staff) meet on a monthly basis or as needed.

D. Staff Development. Training for coordinating teachers occurs throughout the year, including the summer months. Inservice for instructional procedures is provided for some teachers on the district level, and the remaining teachers receive instruction at the building level. Particular emphasis has been given to training in group processes and other means of facilitating participatory decisionmaking.

Assessment

The program is basically assessed on an informal basis through sharing of opinions. There is an annual evaluation form completed by staff members, and both the principal and assistant principal are evaluated by the staff anonymously.

Assessment has found that the Policy Making Through a Participatory Process program:

- provides the basis for the "staff working together" to offer an "excellent educational program";
- makes the school environment "wonderful, challenging, and professional";
- develops small support systems that provide a larger network support system; and
- produces high morale within the entire school.

The effects on the staff and community are to provide an opportunity for more input into the total school operation and to offer more opportunities for staff members to develop leadership roles in the school.

Future of the Program

The staff and administration at Penn Forest Elementary School are committed to continuing their collaborative decisionmaking process. By implementing this program, the staff feel they have created an environment where each person

is respected and important. The staff takes pride in the democratic and supportive atmosphere. The school administrators are seeking to increase the opportunities for teachers to participate in decisionmaking.

Advice to Others

Staff offered the following advice to future implementers of participatory decisionmaking programs. A school should approach collaborative decisionmaking in a systematic manner. The first step is setting mutual goals. The second step is defining priorities and making concrete plans for implementing those priorities. The group should plan for a periodic evaluation of the extent to which (1) goals have been met, and (2) the process continues to involve all members. Penn Forest personnel also feel that inservice training is a valuable investment to keep the program going and to allow it to adapt to change.

Accomplishments

PARTICIPATORY decisionmaking projects in the schools of this study resulted in greatest accomplishments in the areas of communications and school climate. Respondents were asked on the written survey, "What have been the accomplishments of the project/program during the past year? Describe what you're most proud of and/or any impact the project/program has had on the school staff or students." Analysis of audiotaped telephone interviews with the principal and teacher representatives from each project school yielded additional accomplishments.

Communications

Improved communications was the most often cited accomplishment. Both teachers and administrators described an increase in their communication skills and an increase in the amount of sharing between teachers outside of project meetings. One respondent mentioned increased efficiency of communication as demonstrated by the need for fewer full faculty meetings. Another respondent cited improvement in communications between the school and citizens and local businesses as participatory decisionmaking was used in meetings with these groups. Openness of communication or increased awareness of the freedom to express one's ideas and opinions was described by many teachers and administrators.

School Climate

Climate improvements were the second most frequently mentioned accomplishment. Respondents reported "evolution of a team work spirit," greater respect for all individuals' ideas, increased respect for students and parents, increased number of educator contributions to school improvement, and pride held by all school members in the improved school climate. Many teachers and principals stated that implementing the decisionmaking project had led to improved teacher morale. Characteristic of the climate improvements cited was the statement by one respondent who described her school as now having a "nonthreatening atmosphere where teachers can freely express opinions."

Other Accomplishments

Several more concrete accomplishments were also described, including the development and articulation of a schoolwide policy and philosophy, an increase in professional development opportunities for teachers, a decrease in the turnover rate among teachers, and a decline in student discipline problems. Three respondents also cited improved student achievement test scores (self-report data only). Finally, the development of trust between educators and of shared valued structures were described as accomplishments.

Assessment Measures

Accomplishments cited were very similar for teacher and principal respondents but were not often based on a formal assessment of the effectiveness of the participatory decisionmaking project. In telephone interviews, each respondent was asked to describe any evaluation measure used to evaluate the project or its components. The use of formal or written evaluation instruments was reported by two schools' respondents, but the focus of the instrument in one was evaluation of the administrator's job performance. A detailed description of or copy of either instrument was not secured by this study. More commonly, respondents reported informal assessment of how the project was working during meetings of participatory decisionmaking groups. Given the perceptual nature of accomplishments cited, adopters of similar projects may want to consider using pre- and post-project attitudinal surveys. Many respondents expressed an interest in formally assessing educator opinions of changes related to their participatory decisionmaking projects.

Obstacles

IN written program descriptions, respondents were asked to state the biggest obstacle to the success of participatory decisionmaking at their school. Followup clarification was obtained through telephone interviews with respondents.

Lack of Time

The lack of time was a frequently mentioned obstacle even though many of the projects had arranged for teacher release time for committee decisionmaking. The lack of unencumbered time on the part of teachers created obstacles in scheduling meetings but also made difficult the necessary provision of support and feedback between project coordinators, administrators, and teachers. One respondent stated, "This project could double or triple in effectiveness in direct relation to the amount of time allocated to its necessary components."

Communications

Communications may have been cited as the most noted accomplishment by several of the respondents because they had worked to overcome problems in this area. However, obstacles in communications also were frequently cited. These included faculty working individually and reacting rather than working collegially and enacting. The difficulty of selecting coordinators who are self-confident, objective, and able to communicate unpleasant decisions to teachers was a communications problem the projects confronted. As coordinators met interpersonal conflicts within teams or level meetings, there were often few resources to assist them in solving these problems. The lack of previous training in effective communication strategies for educators was described by some respondents as an obstacle to success.

Other Obstacles

A large staff size was cited as a positive by some respondents and as an obstacle to the project by others. Majority voting often failed to please all faculty members. One teacher added that teachers were not usually asked for opinions and were sometimes disappointed when their recommendations were not acted upon.

Finally, two obstacles were mentioned that reflect the progress of the projects in establishing and institutionalizing participatory decisionmaking. One respondent stated that while full participation of the faculty is the goal, getting everyone to "buy in" to the processes without dominating was an early obstacle. An administrator mentioned that one difficulty of sharing decisionmaking was deciding which decisions can be best made through participatory decisionmaking and which ones administrators or teachers should make independently.

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Appendices

VAESP-VEA-AEL STUDY GROUP

Participatory Decisionmaking
Project/Program Description Form

Your responses to the following questions will contribute to a publication on participatory decisionmaking projects in elementary schools throughout Virginia. **Responses to questions 7-10 will be summarized with no individual school information identified.** Responses to all other questions will be used to develop a one-page description of your project/program with contact information included. You may attach any documents which will assist in preparing the description.

1. Project/Program Name: _____

   School Name: _____

   Address: _____

   _____

   Phone: _____

   My name: _____
   School Principal, Key Teacher Representative (circle one)

   Phone at which I may be reached during June-July 1987 _____

2. Project/Program Goals

-over-

3. How were the above goals identified or adopted? Were the goals developed at the school or district level or adopted as part of a state or nationally validated project?

4. How is the project/program organized? For example, who is involved in making decisions? How did they become involved--volunteer, nominated? What length of term does a member serve? How often are meetings held? Does the project/program have task forces or subgroups? What are examples of member and group responsbilities?

5. Describe any training or staff development provided for project/ program participants.

6. Estimate the costs of the project/program in terms of additional personnel required, released time for teachers, staff development/ training costs, etc.

7. What have been the accomplishments of the project/program during the past year? Describe what you're most proud of and/or any impact the project/program has had on the school staff or students. (Responses will be summarized.)

8. What was or is the biggest obstacle to the success of participatory decisionmaking projects? (Responses will be summarized.)

-over-

9. Will the project/program be continued during the 1987-88 school year? Why or why not? (Responses will be summarized.)

10. The publication in which this information will be included will be distributed to educators interested in participatory decisionmaking models. What advice on implementing such a project/program would you offer to others? (Responses will be summarized.)

Thank you for your assistance. Study group members may be contacting you by phone at a later date for further project/program details. Please provide a telephone number where you may be reached during June and July 1987.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
1031 Quarrier Street / P.O. Box 1348 • Charleston, West Virginia 25325 • (304) 347-0400
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TELEPHONE PROTOCOL GUIDE
VEA-VAESP STUDY GROUP

- What are some specific examples of participatory decisions?

- Can you provide us with some samples of agendas or other supportive materials, e.g. team minutes?

- what are your future plans for participatory decisionmaking in your school?

- Where did the idea for you school's participatory decisionmaking project come from? Explain the development.

- Review program descriptions and request additional information where necessary.